

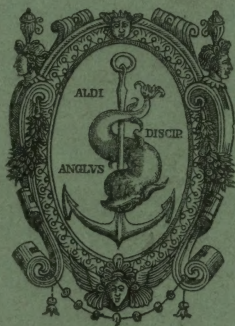
THE
FIRST OF MAY

A NEW VERSION OF A CELEBRATED
MODERN BALLAD

BY ANNA HARRIET DRURY

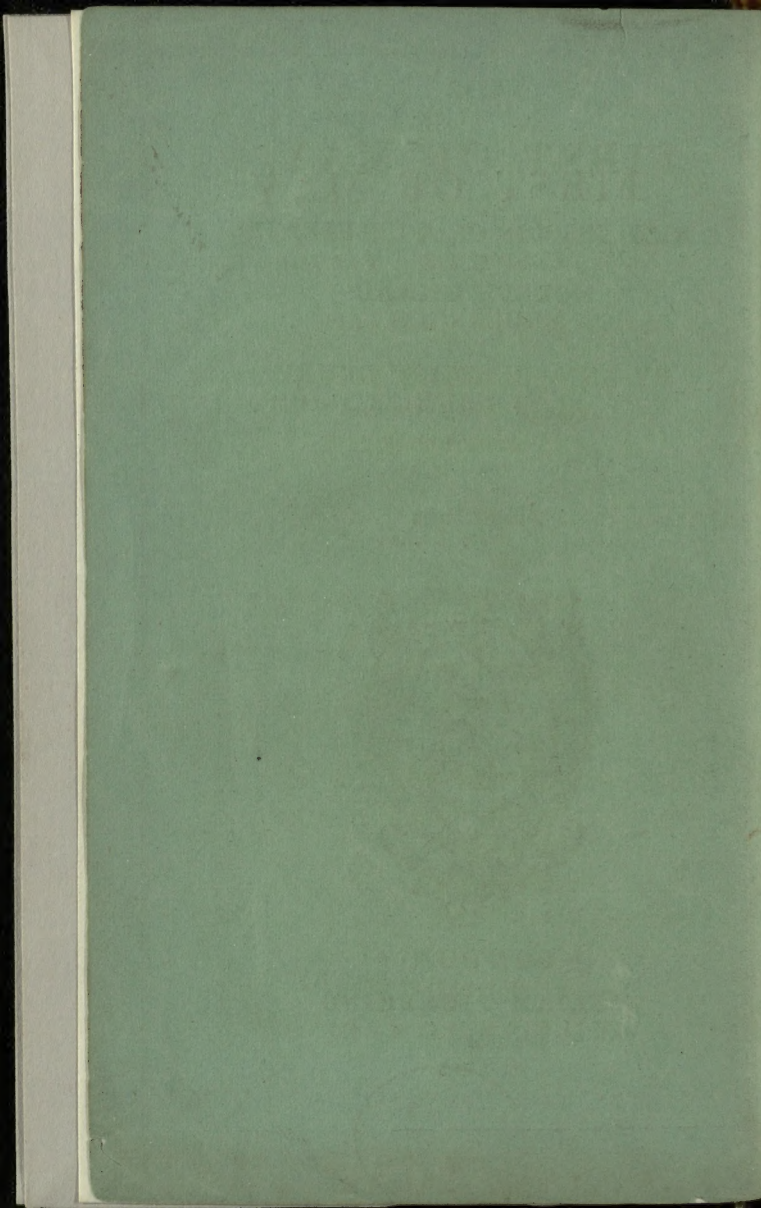
AUTHORESS OF FRIENDS AND
FORTUNE, ETC.

Sixth Edition



LONDON
WILLIAM PICKERING





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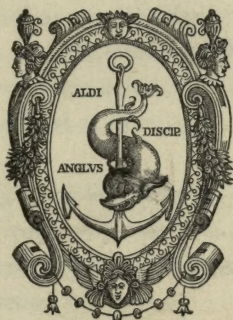
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HM
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THE FIRST OF MAY.

PRINCE Albert of Saxe Coburg
By the Cinque Ports he swore,
He'd make an Exhibition
That was never seen before.

By the Cinque Ports he swore it,
And named an opening day :
And letters wrote to left and right,
To bid the universe unite
Upon the First of May.

Left and right the letters went,
To city, realm, and coast ;
And answers came most civilly,
By the return of post.
Shame on the lazy Nation,
That will not join her share,
With Albert and Britannia,
To swell the World's great Fair !

The parcels and the packages
Come bundling in amain,
By many a creaking waggon;
By many a flying train;
By many a van of Pickford's,
That filled with ponderous care,
Makes every passer by exclaim,
" Good gracious, just look there !"

From autocratic Russia,
Where growls the unctuous Bear,
Who covers native Poles with grief,
And British polls with hair;
From France, the land of elegance,
And witty elocution,
Whose clever hands make all things well
Except a constitution;

From the far-off Republic,
On Transatlantic waves,
Who blazons stars of liberty
Upon the stripes of slaves;
From where the Alpine snows surround
The workshops of the free;
From where in fettered sadness burns
The muse of Italy!

.

The Prince and the Commission

A weary life they led :

No time had they for dining,

And rather less for bed.

They couldn't choose a building,

They couldn't find a site :

And our good Queen Victoria

Grew tired—as well she might.

For good advice in pamphlets,

And prophecies in calf,

And groans to make him shudder,

And sneers to make him laugh,

And hints and threats and warnings,

Plan, diagram, and view,

Choked up the Prince's davenport,

And filled his pockets too.

“ To eastward and to westward,”

'Twas said, “ alarm is spreading ;

“ The foreigners will eat us

“ Out of house and home and bedding ;

“ Taxation will be trebled,

“ And sadder far to tell,

“ Thanks to the horrid papers,

“ *The tickets will not sell !*”

I wis, in all the Palace
There was no heart so bold,
But wished himself well out of it,
When that ill news was told.
Up rose at length Prince Albert,
Up rose the whole Commission,
And at the footstool of the throne
They laid the Exhibition.

Just then burst in a messenger,
With cold sweat on his brow :
“ Look here, look here, my gracious Prince !
“ They say there’ll be a row !”
Upon the fatal newspaper
Prince Albert turned his eye,
And saw a night of wretchedness
Darken his sunny sky.

And plainly and more plainly
In history’s page he read,
The gibes and jeers and sarcasms,
Heaped on his luckless head :
And the stigma of ridiculous,
More terrible than guilt,
Stamped by unborn Macaulays,
On “ the House that Albert built.”

And plainly and more plainly
He heard the words of doom,
When all the year's expenses
Are checked by Joseph Hume;
And the outcry of the journals,
And the angry people's hisses,
And his loving consort's mild reproof,
"You know whose doing *this* is!"

And the Prince's voice was sad,
And dim his eye of blue:
"It's come to this, my gracious wife,
"We don't know what to do!
"There's not a soul contented;
"The tickets will not sell;
"And now the papers prophesy
"Such things I fear to tell!

"The French will spoil our morals,
"The Russians cheat and *knout* us—
"They'll haunt us like mosquitoes,
"Like snakes they'll twine about us—
"The Chartist and the Communist
"Will hand in hand combine,
"And break the Crystal Palace
"About your head and mine!

Then out spake Queen Victoria,
And brightly glanced her eye:

" I never heard such nonsense !

" I only wish they'd try !

" Don't mind those vile reports, dear—

" 'Twill all come right, you'll see :

" Just keep the workmen moving,

" And leave the rest to me !

" I'll order out the carriage,

" My royal robes I'll wear,

" And though the crowd be millions deep,

" No matter—I'll be there !

" And in the face of rough John Bull,

" Whate'er he means to do,

" I'll smile until he smiles again,

" And gives a cheer for you !

" There'll be some foolish people there,

" Indeed, where are they not ?

" Perhaps they'll throw a stone or two,

" Or fire a little shot :

" They never hit me yet, dear,

" Except upon my bonnet ;

" So don't persuade me not to go—

" I've set my heart upon it !

“ Unpack the parcels, gentlemen,
“ As quickly as ye may :
“ Tell all your foreign colleagues,
“ I’ll hear of no delay !
“ Though foemen league in millions,
“ We’ll charm away their malice,
“ And walk together, arm in arm,
“ Right through the Crystal Palace !”

“ My heart of hearts,” the Prince replied,
“ You talk just like a book.”

And the relieved Commissioners
Cheered till the throne-room shook :
And through the streets of London,
Fast, fast, the news was borne ;
And strange was the commotion,
Upon the morrow morn.

Then none would hear of waiting ;
Then all were wild to go ;
Then did the ticket offices
With claimants overflow ;
And every British lady
Spared neither rhyme nor reason,
To wring from consort or from sire
A ticket for the season.

Bright are the silks and satins
That gleam in Howell's panes ;
Matchless the lace of Hayward,
The ribbon at Redmayne's ;
Best of all gloves are Melnotte's,
That mortal ever wore ;
Best of all treats a young bride loves
A Continental tour.

But now, o'er Howell's counter,
No fairy buyers lean ;
No snowy fingers test the lace,
Or ribbons blue and green ;
In vain are Melnotte's prices
Raised up to three-and-three ;
And vainly advertises
The Steamboat Company !

This year no golden harvest
Shall prima donnas reap ;
This year no Baden Croupier
Shall shear the travelling sheep ;
And the landladies of Brighton,
Shall wail o'er cliff and down,
Those cruel season tickets,
That keep the world in town !

.

But meanwhile, preparations
Are briskly carried on ;
And agonized exhibitors
Are told they *must* begone.
The floor is swept and sprinkled,
The panes are polished bright,
And all that isn't finished
Is hustled out of sight.

Then come the season tickets,
In carriage, cab, and brougham ;
And long before eleven,
There is scarcely standing room ;
And as at every instant
The ladies' ranks increase,
Pretty, to see the skirmishes
They have with the police.

But lo, the cry is "*Paxton!*"
And as the waves divide,
The Architect of crystal
Comes forth with modest pride.
Well may all voices cheer him,
When they see what he has done ;
For such a graceful victory
No mortal ever won !

Now Statesmen and Ambassadors
From all the globe flock in;
And that warm-hearted gentleman,
The Chinese Mandarin.
And with his gallant comrade,
The first in danger's van,
Comes England's white-haired Hero,
To welcome PEACE TO MAN.

But when the face of Arthur
Is seen amid the throng,
A cheer that shakes the crystal roof,
Bursts forth the ranks among.
On the benches smiles no beauty
But would his hand have kissed;
For the fairest lip were honoured
To touch that brown old fist.

And when weak-minded foreigners
Ask what it's all about,
With what enthusiastic pride
All haste to point him out!
"Now, welcome, welcome, Arthur!"
The greetings still increase:
"Thrice welcome on thy birthday morn,
"To the Waterloo of Peace!"

.

Since five o'clock this morning,
Nay, some have said, before,
The folks have been collecting
By myriads and more.
Frantiely strive officials
To keep the passage free:
As well might Brighton lobsters
Attempt to stop the sea!

For like a herd scholastic,
Let loose from desk and form,
John Bull and all his family,
Carry the Park by storm.
From Palace e'en to Palace,
Can only heads be seen,
That pushing past, in wild career,
Policeman, Guardsman, Grenadier,
Rush on to meet the Queen.

Then round our good Victoria,
As slowly on she past,
A hundred winged whispers
Come floating thick and fast.
"What if these millions rise in arms?
"Think on the Bourbon's fate!
"What if but *one* assail thee?
"Back—ere it be too late!"

Round gazed she, as not deigning
Such fears to entertain :
Yes—if indeed they hated her,
Then had she lived in vain !
For the people's glow of welcome
Is the Monarch's purest gem—
And her heart was calm and confident
In its honest love for *them* !

“ O England—gallant England !
“ So tried—and yet so true !
“ You will not do your sovereign wrong,
“ Who trusts her all to you ! ”
So she spake, and smiling showed
The young heir by her side,
And mid a thunder of applause,
Sailed through the living tide.

And now she gains the Transept,
And now her royal throne :
Now burst the sweet young voices,
And swells the organ's tone :
Now with her Lord and children,
And smiles of winning grace,
She passes through the joyous crowd,
That all may see her face.

And that face will be remembered
To many a distant day,
When the glitter of the pageant
Like a dream has passed away ;
And the frankness and the kindliness
Of that auspicious scene,
Shall link with all our better thoughts,
Our English-hearted Queen !

And in the homes of labour,
When all have learnt to know
The one sweet tie of brotherhood
God knit for man below—
When honest toil is resting
Beside his quiet hearth,
And forgets the gloom of forge and loom,
In his children's fearless mirth ;

When the wrongs are all forgiven,
And the law of kindness rules,
When the swords are turned to ploughshares,
And the prisons into schools ;
When rich and poor together,
Flock to the House of Prayer,
And not a cloud of bitterness
Disturbs the sunshine *there* ;

When the actors in this pageant
Have all been laid to rest,
And the youngest head among us,
Is white as Snowdon's crest ;
May that glad generation
Recal this glorious day,
And Labour's first Ovation,
Upon the First of May !



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